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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 000657

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR SA/INS AND DS/OP/NEA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [CASC](#) [PTER](#) [NP](#)

SUBJECT: MAOISTS REPORTEDLY POSTPONE FIVE-DAY STRIKE

REF: A) KATHMANDU 0604

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Late in the morning of April 1, the Embassy began to receive reports from usually reliable press and human rights sources that the Maoists have decided to postpone the five-day general strike, or "bandh," called for April 2-6, to April 23-27, in response to broad-based public discontent at the bandh's coinciding with national secondary school exams. Shortly before 5:00 p.m. local time Embassy received a press release signed by Maoist supremo Prachanda, originally sent to BBC, confirming the postponement. Text of Embassy's unofficial translation of the Nepali-language press release follows in Para 6 below. News sources generally regard the press release and signature as authentic. Septel details Embassy actions following an EAC meeting and preparations for April 2. The insurgents' action offers a hopeful indication that they may sometimes be vulnerable to coordinated public pressure, and is an encouraging--and regrettably rare--demonstration of what well-concerted efforts by civil society in Nepal's generally fractious and self-interested political landscape can sometimes still achieve. End summary.

2. (SBU) Late in the morning of April 1, just one day before the five-day national strike, or "bandh," called by the Maoists for April 2-6, the Embassy began to receive verbal reports from several press and human rights sources that the Maoists had decided to postpone the bandh till April 23-27. None of the sources contacted, however, had received anything in writing, and many--the Embassy included--were reluctant to take the verbal reports at face value without the typical accompanying press release to back them up. Others, such as Kantipur FM radio station and the local AFP correspondent, began to report the postponement as fact, even without written verification.

3. (SBU) An editor of a vernacular daily, who first contacted the Embassy Public Diplomacy section with news of the cancellation, identified his source as a known Maoist contact who had habitually supplied reliable information in the past. The head of a local human rights organization described his informant in the same way, noting that the original information had come from the Maoist leadership "in India" to Kathmandu regional headquarters, and predicting the verbal report would be shortly followed up by something in writing. Lila Mani Pokhrel, a left-wing United People's Front Member of Parliament, also told assembled MPs at an afternoon session of Parliament that he had received similar word verbally from Maoist sources, and expected to have written confirmation by late afternoon.

4. (SBU) Many sources contacted generally viewed reports of the postponement as authentic, despite the lack of written back-up, citing coordinated protests over the past several weeks by members of civil society, including human rights and teachers' groups, decrying the harmful effect of the bandh on a broad spectrum of Nepali society--secondary school students who have to take the compulsory national examinations, scheduled to begin the same day as the bandh, in order to qualify for higher education. Subodh Raj Pyakurel, the head of the local human rights organization INSEC, in a prominent public statement predicted the Maoist bandh would create for the movement thousands of sworn instant enemies throughout the nation. Other human rights groups followed up with public statements calling on the Maoists to cancel the bandh, citing the negative impact on Nepali youth from all strata of society.

5. (U) Shortly before 5:00 p.m. Embassy Public Diplomacy section received, via a contact at BBC, a copy of the press statement, apparently signed by Maoist supremo Prachanda. Most media and human rights sources contacted view the signature and press release as authentic. Septel reports actions taken by the Embassy EAC on operating hours April 2.

6. (U) Begin text of unofficial translation of press release from Prachanda:

Press Release

It is well known to all about the announcement regarding the Nepal Bandh program from tomorrow, April 2-6, with the

objective of fostering a unified struggle against the military dictatorship imposed by the feudal dictators, who changed the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) exam dates by some weeks. The conspiracy of openly attacking the political outcome of the people's movement of 1990 by the feudal dictators in order to permanently establish a military dictatorship is plainly seen. Not only our analysis and conclusion from the time of the royal massacre have been proved right, but the appeal made by us to the political powers inside and outside of Parliament for extensive, unified revolution against this conspiracy has also been strongly justified. The feudal dictators and their supporters, who have shown insincerity and deceived the country and the people, have continued their campaign of mass killings and have shifted the date of the examination, instead of providing a secure future to students. In this situation, our great and glorious party, CPN (Maoist), has shifted the Nepal Bandh program, which was announced by the party along with (other) concrete programs of the Revolutionary People's Council, from April 2-6, because we have realized our responsibility towards the future of the students and the request made by the academic community, parents and guardians (of students), and friendly political parties. We have changed the Nepal Bandh program to April 23-27. We would like to seriously appeal as usual to all to help make the five-day bandh a success and a positive way out of the state of emergency. We would like to reiterate our commitment that we would end all such programs, if an environment is created so that a positive political way out can be found. If the killings of the sons and daughters of ordinary people continues every day, then there is no alternative but to retaliate extensively.

Prachanda  
Chairman  
CPN (Maoist)  
April 1, 2002

End text of unofficial translation of press release.

17. (SBU) Comment: The Maoists originally called the bandh to coincide with the national secondary school exams, thereby hoping to embarrass the embattled GON and increase public dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of the emergency. But they obviously did not count on the wide-spread outcry their plans generated from members of Nepali society in all walks of life. By targeting the national secondary school exams, the Maoists managed to strike a chord that reverberated from the highest levels of society down to the lowest--and earned themselves some rather negative PR coverage in the process. That the Maoists have only postponed the bandh, rather than outright cancelling it, is regrettable, but at least the postponement puts the students out of the direct line of fire. Local human rights groups are taking credit for pressuring the Maoists to call off the bandh. If that is actually the reason for the withdrawal, it offers a hopeful indication that Maoists can be susceptible to public pressure, and is encouraging--and rare--evidence of what well-concerted efforts by civil society in Nepal's generally fractious and self-interested political landscape can still achieve.

MALINOWSKI